



White Board

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Center for Effective Undergraduate Teaching (864) 388-8426

Getting Students to Practice

I FLUNKED OUT of college seven times. Yes, seven times. While there are many great tales associated with each failure—friends causing endless distractions, having to work late, one lame excuse after another—ultimately, I accepted that I am responsible for never acting like a student. Seven times I signed up, seven times I purchased books, seven times I went to class for a couple of weeks, and seven times I was off on another (ostensibly more important) adventure.

Now, on the first day of class, I share my circuitous path to completing a master's in composition and rhetoric, and a sense of "if this tattooed English teacher can do it, I can" falls over the students. Next, I tell the intrigued, yet anxious students that there will be no homework! A larger sigh of relief manifests along with looks of confusion. The student perspective intervention has begun.

The students begin feeling somewhat confident ... how can you fail a class with no homework? And somewhat anxious ... how can you pass a class with no homework? They are waiting for the punchline. As any good performance artist does, I deliver, "I do, however, provide practice. SMART Practice!"

The SMART Practice idea arose from the prima facie answer students provide when I ask, "What do you need to do to improve your academic prowess?" Most answer, "Study harder and longer." No, harder and longer is for Crossfit. Besides, what does harder and longer even mean? Reading for four hours with music pounding in her ears isn't making Joelle a better student. Instead, Joelle is frustrated because four hours of highlighting nearly every sentence doesn't improve critical reading. However, treating the brain as a muscle that responds to strategic practice; not simply reading and highlighting, but previewing the glossary or questions to be familiar with new vocabulary or concepts; YouTubing the topic for videos on the concept; keeping vocabulary log leads—these are the things that lead to efficient studenting. Students practicing learning skills are like the basketball

player practicing free throws or the pianist practicing scales.

Fifteen years in education as a writing tutor, a mentor for student-athletes, an academic coordinator for men's basketball, and an English teacher has taught me the student population I choose to work with lacks student skills. Research shows many students, especially those from lower socio-economic situations, "understand so little of the coursework that they couldn't possibly complete independent work. And many feel that even if they did try, their efforts would be too little, too late" (Hinchey, p. 244).

I felt (and still feel) the same way about homework; who wants to go home and work? While working with athletes both in the classroom and on the court, I saw students committed to improving their game through practice; sometimes tediously bouncing the ball up the court with the left hand and then back down the court with the right. A practice each basketball player started doing the first time they walked onto the court to learn to play the game. Few embrace the fundamentals at first; especially when it's the monster dunks, no-look passes, and half-court shots that make the nightly sports highlight reel. But coaches have strategies and every drill has a purpose. In turn, as the players watched videos, read playbooks, and listened to coaches lecture, the students took notes and critically thought about their roles on the team and how they should respond in different game situations.

Observing this dynamic led me to adjust aspects of my teaching philosophy to give students practice, not homework, and to treat the classroom as place to practice writing skills. The underpinning is to treat the students as having basic student/writing skills that can be developed. While my perspective is simpler to change than many students' self-filling prophecy of "I can't write, it's too hard!", with perspective adjustment, studenting overcomes the singular focus on developing a skill. Thus, students need a mantra to guide them to efficient practice.

To ensure the student practice doesn't

resemble homework, the student philosophy SMART Practice was born.

Strategy. Students approach each course's practice with a plan. For example, Kiana used to go to class without reviewing and noting words and concepts from the history book glossary before class. After a session with a writing coach, Kiana now reviews the course text for vocabulary and concepts, which makes the instructor's lecture more accessible.

Mindful. Students focus on the task at hand by minimizing distractions when studying. Consider Tyra, who treats practice time as a ritual by shutting off her phone and music so she can concentrate on her Math 75x class for an hour.

Adaptive. While students know that time management is important, they recognize sometimes the best laid plans go awry and some items on the to-do list may have to be saved for another day. For example, today Kalei planned to write a draft on community gardens while her children ate breakfast; however, Kela woke up with a sore throat. This mean Kalei had to take Kela to the doctor and find time later in the day to work

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Mid-Term Week - Feb. 18-22

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First Monday of the Month

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October 1	April 1
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January 7	July 1
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TWO CHEERS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

A leading expert challenges the prevailing gloomy outlook on higher education with solid evidence of its successes

Crushing student debt, rapidly eroding state funding, faculty embroiled in speech controversies, a higher-education market disrupted by online competition—today's headlines suggest that universities' power to advance knowledge and shape American society is rapidly declining. But Steven Brint, a renowned analyst of academic institutions, has tracked numerous trends demonstrating their vitality. After a recent period that witnessed soaring student enrollment and ample research funding, universities, he argues, are in a better position than ever before.

In describing how universities can meet such challenges head on, especially in improving classroom learning, Brint offers not only a clear-eyed perspective

on the current state of American higher education but also a pragmatically optimistic vision for the future. - Amazon

Steven Brint is Distinguished Professor of Sociology and Public Policy at the University of California, Riverside, where he directs the Colleges & Universities 2000 Project. His books include Schools and Societies, In an Age of Experts, and The Diverted Dream, and he has written for the Chronicle of Higher Education, the Los Angeles Review of Books, and the Washington Post. - Amazon

Two Cheers for Higher Education

Author: Steven Brint

Hardcover: 504 pages

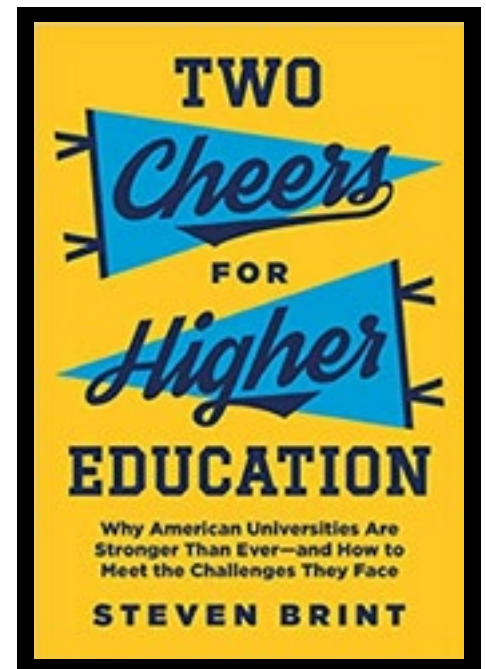
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Practicing

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on her English 100 draft.

Reflective. It's important not to become complacent. What worked on the last test may not work this time. Or maybe it didn't work, so they need to find a better approach. Thus, students focus on what areas to improve as this perspective motivates students to continually improve their practice rather than define themselves as failures. Consequently, students evaluate what skill(s) can be improved and take the initiative to do the practice necessary to enhance that specific student skill. For instance, when Kalani assessed his math skills, he realized he struggled remembering formulas. When visiting a math coach, Kalani learned to rewrite each problem he solved three times before moving to the next problem; the first two times to familiarize the formula process and one or two more times bottom up to make sure he owns the process (this is how you check a problem's solution).

Timely. Students prioritize practice over recreation. When asked to go have coffee after school, Nalu told Keanu "no" because she had a math 100 exam in the morning. Nalu suggested Keanu text her at the end of the week when she would have time.

PRACTICE. Repeated exercise in or performance of an activity or skill to acquire or maintain proficiency in it. For example, practicing one's typing skills to improve efficiency, which makes studenting easier.

As an instructor, the SMART approach means I adjust my teaching style to model the behavior the students should integrate into their student skills practice. It also means integrating practice into the classroom. And while covering all the required material of a course in a semester is difficult, including strategic practices or drills improves student output. The practice can be, in the case of composition, proofreading drills, in-class proofreading/revising practice, vocabulary, etc.

In the end, my teaching philosophy is this; I can help most any student pass English 100,

but that doesn't necessarily ensure student success. However, if I use skill development drills to develop study skills, successful students emerge. This means instructors investing in improving the students' student skills will have a greater impact on the student persistence than simply helping them pass the course. Ultimately, the instructor and students benefit when both invest time throughout the semester to polish student skills.

Reference

Hinchey, Pat. "Why Kids Say They Don't Do Homework." *Clearing House* 69, no. 4. (December 24, 2015): 242-45. Accessed October 7, 2018. ERIC.

Conrad Maddox is an assistant professor of language arts at Honolulu Community College.

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